



News Release

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Contacts: Julie Graham, Communications Office
Kate Lynch Communications Office

360-236-4022

360-236-4072

Holiday gathering season begins; flu season means disease may also pay a visit

Gathering together can spread influenza and other viruses – early vaccination helps

OLYMPIA — Fall has arrived, and with it comes holiday gatherings and festivities. Fall also ushers in the start of flu activity. Holiday gatherings bring friends and family close together, creating an opportunity for illnesses like flu to spread. By using good health manners and being vaccinated against the flu and other preventable diseases, people can stay healthier while spending time with loved ones.

“Getting a flu vaccine every year is the first and most important step in protecting yourself and your family from serious illness,” said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes, a pediatrician.

“Washing your hands, covering your cough, and staying home when you’re sick also helps stop the spread of flu and other respiratory illnesses, like whooping cough.”

Flu viruses spread when people with flu produce droplets from their mouths or noses while coughing, sneezing, or talking. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. People can also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes, or nose. A person can spread flu before they know they’re sick.

Flu seasons are unpredictable and can be severe. In the United States, over a recent 30-year period, the flu was linked to thousands of deaths each year — ranging from 3,000 to 49,000.

Flu can cause serious illness even in healthy people. Everyone six months and older should get a flu shot each year. Flu shots are especially important for people at high risk for complications from the flu, including young kids, people 65 and older, pregnant women and women who recently gave birth, and people with certain medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, and neurologic conditions.

To be protected during the holidays, it's important to plan ahead. It takes two weeks after vaccination to be protected from the flu. Health care providers recommend that some kids under nine get two doses of vaccine about four weeks apart for the best protection.

Whooping cough is still spreading in Washington, so it's also important to make sure that everyone in the family is up-to-date on whooping cough immunizations. Teens and adults should get Tdap vaccine and kids should get DTaP vaccine.

All recommended vaccines including those for flu and whooping cough are provided at no cost for all Washington kids through age 18 years. Most health insurance plans cover flu vaccine for adults and the Department of Health bought Tdap vaccine for uninsured or underinsured adults; local health agencies have information about vaccine availability.

Information on where to find immunizations is available through health care providers, local health agencies, the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588, and the [online flu vaccine finder](#).

Visit the [Department of Health website](#) for a healthy dose of information about [flu](#) and [whooping cough](#). Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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